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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000003

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SUBJECT: REACTIONS TO SADDAM'S EXECUTION BREAK ALONG
SECTARIAN LINES

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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Summary

¶1. (C) Reactions in Bahrain, a Shia majority country with a Sunni ruling family, to Saddam's December 30 execution followed predictable lines. The government has issued no official statement about the execution. Two small Baathist political societies condemned the trial and execution and opened a majles to receive condolence calls for "the martyr of the nation." A Shia politician said the execution heralded a new era for Iraq and hoped increasing sectarianism in Iraq did not cause a partition within Bahraini society. A leftist political activist called the execution a proper end for a leader who favored adventurism and ruled through violence. While people to a great extent had already accepted the execution, its timing and manner in which it was carried out could exacerbate bitterness between Bahrain's Sunni and Shia communities. End Summary.

Baathist Groups Open Condolence Majles

¶2. (SBU) Reactions to the December 30 execution of Saddam Hussein followed predictable patterns in Bahrain, a majority Shia country with a Sunni ruling family and Sunni-dominated government, military, and security forces. Perhaps taking advantage of the long Eid Al Adha and New Year's holiday closure, the government issued no official statement about the execution. Bahrain's small Baathist organizations, the Nationalist Democratic Congregation Society and Al Wasat Al Arabi Islamic Society, were the most vocal, condemning the execution and opening a majles to receive condolences for "the martyr of the nation." (The condolence majles was covered prominently in one local newspaper.) National Democratic Congregation Society vice secretary general Dr. Hassan Al Aali told the press that the execution was unfair and unjust because Saddam's trial was conducted while Iraq was under U.S. occupation. He said that the execution was carried out "for political reasons so the U.S. could gain control" of Iraq. He expects to see more opposition and unrest in Iraq. Al Wasat Al Arabi Islamic Society issued a statement saying "the assassination of the legitimate Iraqi president was conducted by the American regime, the Zionist Entity (Israel), and the Safawi regime (Iran)."

Shia, Moderates Look Beyond Saddam

¶3. (SBU) Jalal Fairouz, member of parliament representing leading Shia opposition society Al Wifaq, told the press that

the execution heralded a new era for Iraq, which he said had been full of bloodshed under Saddam and the Baath regime. He worried that the execution could further exacerbate sectarian tensions in Iraq and hoped it would not have an impact on Bahrain's political situation. "We can see how the Iraqi population is divided between Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds, and we hope this won't cause any partition in Bahraini society," he said. Al Wifaq member and human rights activist Nizar Al Qari said publicly that Saddam received the right punishment for the crimes his regime committed.

14. (SBU) Dr. Hassan Madan, head of the leftist Minbar Democratic Society, told the press that execution was the proper end for a leader who favored adventurism and ruled through violence. "We need to draw the lesson that dictatorships invariably end in catastrophes for the people. We need to uphold the values of tolerance, power-sharing, and co-existence in order to advance nations. Saddam did the opposite by engaging in military adventures and dominating his people through the military and intelligence services." Ibrahim Sharif, secretary general of the liberal, secular Al Waad society, said publicly that there should be real attempts to get at the root of the problem in Iraq. He accused the -wed States, Britain, and France of arming Saddam and called for a proper investigation.

Controversy Over Timing of Execution

15. (C) Echoing statements from Saudi Arabia and Egypt that were published in Bahraini newspapers, many people have criticized the timing of the execution, coming on the morning of the Sunni celebration of Eid Al Adha. (Most but not all

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Shia in Bahrain celebrated Eid Al Adha one day later, on December 31.) Al Waad's Sharif said the execution was untimely and complained that no one would consider holding an execution on Christmas or New Year's Day. He said choosing Eid Al Adha was a sign of disrespect for Muslims. Another controversial aspect of the execution is the reports of witnesses taunting Saddam in his final moments. Former minister and prominent member of the National Democratic Congregation Society Dr. Ali Fakhro told the Ambassador that the way the execution was carried out only served to exacerbate sectarian friction.

16. (SBU) In a statement to the press, Iraqi Embassy DCM Ahmed Agha said the timing of the execution was appropriate because in the 1980s, the Baath regime would deliver the bodies of prisoners who had been killed to their families on Eid Al Adha. He said the government would tell families that their relatives' bodies were an Eid present, but they had to pay the costs of transporting the bodies back home.

Press Commentary Mixed

17. (SBU) President of the moderate Al Meethaq political society Ahmed Juma wrote in Al Ayam newspaper January 3 that carrying out Saddam's execution in front of cameras on the occasion of Eid Al Adha gives the impression to the world that the Arabs represent "a barbarian and savage nation." He said he does not disagree with the execution but comments that the way it was carried out harms the image of the Arabs. Baathist Shura Council member and columnist Sameera Rajab, who attended the condolence majles for Saddam, wrote in Akhbar Al Khaleej newspaper that "Saddam's destiny was to die a martyr. He refused to give in to the occupiers and died standing tall like the palm trees of Iraq. He stood against the Israelis and the Iranians and his heroes are still fighting to preserve our Arab identity from the combined onslaught of the Anglo-Saxons and Iranians."

Comment

18. (C) Reactions to Saddam's execution were mostly low-key and predictable, with sympathizers condemning the trial and hanging and opponents praising the delivery of justice. The controversy over the manner and timing in which the execution was carried out could have some staying power and may result in more bitterness between Bahrain's Sunni and Shia communities than the execution itself, which people had already come to accept.

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